

Behavior-Based Safety Programs: Improving The Company Culture

Behavior-Based Safety (BBS) is all about changing a company's safety culture. BBS has little to do with codes, rules and regulations and everything to do with asking questions such as, "What is the safest way to conduct this task and what must I do to help ensure my safety and the safety of others around me?"

Here are some steps every contractor can take to help change the safety culture:

STEP 1 Get outside help. Contractors are experts in the contracting business, not in safety. To change the safety culture, hire a professional safety director who is well versed in BBS. In addition, hire a consultant to analyze the safety culture and provide guidance.

At times contractors can become too internally focused, but outside help and a fresh set of eyes can help to spawn new thoughts and ideas, and build a strategy and vision for the team to follow.

STEP 2 Get commitment from the whole organization—especially top management. Contractors often have a mindset that safety is the safety director's job or the project safety rep's responsibility. They support the safety director, but only from the sidelines. Top management must get in the game to change and lead—not just support—the safety effort. This takes time, energy, commitment and financial resources. If upper management does not take the lead in safety, then other team members will not buy into the importance.

STEP 3 Training and coaching. A company must be willing to invest in training and personnel development uti-

lizing vendors and third-party trainers to equip employees. Hire safety training organizations that are experienced in the construction industry. Follow training with good coaching from all levels of the organization. Assign upper management to coach project managers so they can coach others on the jobsite. Direct coaching takes organization, energy, time and money, but it leaves a lasting impression. Above all, make sure the safety message is personal to each and every team member. Each individual must understand why safety is important to him, internalize the importance and live it out every day.

STEP 4 Systems and processes. Begin by conducting site safety evaluations with direct feedback to those who are being observed and conduct pre-job hazard assessments. To utilize observations and pre-job assessments effectively requires training, time and money. Don't compromise these processes when busy or when a customer doesn't want to pay for these activities. A strong safety orientation and an interactive company-wide weekly safety call led by top management are just a few keys to success.

STEP 5 Consistent and aggressive accident management plan. Set in place a procedure to have the safety director contacted within 15 minutes of an accident on a site. Big or small accidents should involve an expert to help guide the process to ensure that the employee receives the prop-



er care and that the process is managed well. When starting a project, establish a relationship with a local clinic that understands workers' compensation rules and occupational medicine, giving excellent care to team members as well as protecting the company's interest and investment.

STEP 6 Follow through. This can be a long road. A safety system requires constant attention. Be committed every day of every year to implementing new action plans to help improve the safety culture.

Changing the safety culture isn't done overnight, and instituting Behavior-Based Safety requires as much science as it does art. However, it is an initiative worthy of the investment necessary to see it succeed.

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